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I. Rubén Darío. 1919.



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I. RUBÉN DARÍO

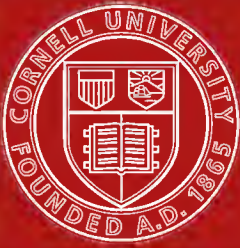
By **GEORGE W. UMPHREY**

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SPANISH-AMERICAN POETS OF TODAY AND YESTERDAY

I. RUBÉN DARÍO

The choice of a subject for this first of a series of studies in recent Spanish American poetry is easily made. Chronologically, priority of treatment might well be claimed by three poets, Gutiérrez Nájera of Mexico, José Asunción Silva of Colombia and Julián del Casal of Cuba, but their claims are more than counterbalanced by those of Rubén Darío, the recently deceased poet of Nicaragua. He is undoubtedly the most important poet in recent Spanish literature and is, moreover, the best representative of all the recent tendencies in the poetry of Spain and of Spanish America.

Literary movements in the last fifty years, especially in poetry, have followed each other in rapid succession. The last of the great Romanticists were forced into the background by the classical reaction; the *Parnassiens* held the field for a time and then gave way to the *Décadents* and *Symbolistes*, known generally as the *Modernistas* in Spanish America and in Spain. Then, finally, in the early years of the present century, the *Modernistas* had to give way to the young poets of today, the "New Poets" as they are sometimes called for lack of a better name. The fact that these movements were of short duration makes it possible to study their essential characteristics in the poetry produced by one versatile writer during his short life of less than fifty years; in the successive volumes of Darío's poetry, particularly in those entitled *Azul...* (1888), *Prosas Profanas*¹ (1896), *Cantos de Vida y Esperanza* (1905), excellent examples of all these literary tendencies may be found.

Born in the Republic of Nicaragua in 1867, Rubén Darío spent only a small part of his life in his native country; just as, in spirit, he wandered at will through all ages of the past, so in body he sojourned for longer or shorter periods of time in many parts of the world. Travel was a vital necessity for his restless spirit, "navigare necesse est" the device on his shield.

Por atavismo griego o por fenicia influencia,
 siempre he sentido en mi ansia de navegar,
 y Jasón me ha legado su sublime experiencia
 y el sentir en mi vida los misterios del mar. (*Retorno*, 1909.)

Throughout his wanderings and sojournings in many parts of the world literature absorbed his intellectual and spiritual energy, and numerous volumes of poetry, critical essays and impressions of travel give proof of his continued literary activity from his early years until his death in 1916.

A precocious child, imaginative and impressionable, he began to write poetry almost as soon as he could write at all, and his poems finding their way into the press, before he had completed his thirteenth year he became known in his country as "el poeta niño." With his entrance into journalism in 1881 began his wanderings through the New World and the Old. In 1888 we find him in Chile, where he published in that year *Azul* . . . , a collection of short stories and poems that laid a firm foundation for his reputation in literature. Shortly afterwards he joined the staff of one of the most widely known newspapers of the New World, *La Nación*, of Argentina, the newspaper that took him to Buenos Aires for many years and that supplied him with the means of travel and sojourn in Europe. In the pages of *La Nación* appeared first most of the articles of literary criticism and impressions of travel that were collected later in his numerous volumes of prose. His native country supplemented from time to time the means of livelihood and the honors he gained by his pen. In 1892 he was one of the delegates sent by Nicaragua to the Colombian celebrations in Madrid. For some time he served his country as consul in Paris; for a shorter time he was Nicaraguan Minister in Madrid. In 1906 he attended the third Pan-American Conference at Rio Janeiro as secretary of the Nicaraguan delegation. In the winter of 1914-1915 he came from Spain to this country in the cause of international peace and closer Pan-American relations. Ill health took him to his native country, where he died in the following year.

Turning now to his literary productions, we find little to detain us in his first volume of precocious verse, *Epístolas y Poemas*, of importance only in the study of the gradual evolution of a clever imitator of the French and Spanish poets of the preceding generation into the strongly individualistic leader of the *Modernistas*. The

poems of his next volume, *Los Abrojos*, indicate a transference of his allegiance from Victor Hugo and Zorrilla to Bécquer and Campoamor. The influence of his models is still apparent, although the introduction of a more personal note into some of the poems shows that he is on the way toward independence. Composed in brief moments of relaxation from his arduous journalistic duties in Santiago de Chile and written in the manner of Campoamor's *Humoradas*, many of these short poems are filled with the bitterness and cynicism of a young man upon whom disillusionment has come with the first close contact with the real world, "las amarguras, los duelos, los desengaños y anhelos" of a young man of twenty. Fortunately, this mood of skepticism, moral agitation and despondency did not outlive his twentieth year; a different mood is that of the following year when he published the collection of poems, *Azul* . . ., beginning:

Mes de rosas. Van mis rimas
en ronda a la vasta selva
a recoger miel y aromas
en las flores entreabiertas.

This small volume of prose and poetry, its title suggested by Victor Hugo's well-known remark, "L'art, c'est l'azure," gained for Rubén Darío a firm foothold in the literary world of Spain and Spanish America. Juan Valera gave it a warm welcome in one of his *Cartas Americanas*, finding everything in it admirable except its title and the strong French influence. In his analysis of the six beautiful poems of the volume he called attention to the literary qualities that place them in the Parnassian school of poetry; their smooth versification, highly polished, though apparently spontaneous; their clear-cut, carefully-chiseled images; the author's cosmopolitanism and intimate familiarity with many literatures; the entire absence of any moral or didactic purpose. He found in them little to disturb the conservative critic; and indeed it may be said that it is necessary to study them from the vantage ground of our present knowledge of Darío's leadership, in order to see working in them the leaven that was to change, by gradual evolution, the conventional poet of *Epístolas y Poemas* of 1885 into the *Modernista* of the *Prosas Profanas* of 1896.

It is in the prose selections of *Azul* . . . that we find unmistakable signs of a literary revolution, literary qualities that place the author

among the great masters of contemporary Spanish prose, Valle Inclán, Benavente, José Enrique Rodó. In the content of these prose selections, fantastic, idealistic impressions, rather than stories in the ordinary sense, it is still the poet that creates. In *El Velo de la Reina Mab*, the fairy queen, overhearing the complaints of the four disconsolate artists, "del fondo de su carro, hecho de una sola perla, tomó un velo azul, casi impalpable, como formado de suspiros, o de mirados de ángeles rubios y pensativos. Y aquel velo era el velo de los sueños, que hacen ver la vida de color de rosa. Y con él envolvió a los cuatro hombres flacos, barbudos e impertinentes," who then joyously and hopefully resumed their tasks. In *El Rey Burgués*, the poor poet, with his high ideals and aspirations, can find no means of gaining a livelihood in the kingdom of the bourgeois king, who turns a deaf ear to his panegyric of the poet's mission and orders him to earn his daily bread by grinding out music from a hand-organ; and even while performing this humble task he is neglected and left to die of cold and hunger, "como gorrión que mata el hielo, con una sonrisa amarga en los labios, y todavía con la mano en el manubrio. ¡Oh, mi amigo el cielo está opaco, el aire frío, el día triste. Flotan brumosas y grises melancolías . . ." Similar to the fine satire in *El Rey Burgués* on present-day industrial civilization, with its love of luxury and ostentation, its complacent satisfaction with the mediocre in the arts, is that of *El Sátiro Sordo*. Orpheus visits the kingdom of the Deaf Satyr, charms all nature with his divine harmony and offers to remain if the Satyr is willing. The latter consults his two advisers, the *alondra* and the *asno*. Unable to hear the favorable counsel of the lark, he turns to the ass, gravely and wisely ruminating, moving his head slowly from side to side. Taking this to mean dissent, the Satyr refuses to permit the sweet singer to remain.

The innovations in the prose in which these stories were written were due mainly to Darío's careful study of French writers. Valera noted with disapproval this strong French influence, the "galicismo mental," as he termed it, and Darío himself, on page 165 of his *Letras*, confesses his indebtedness, especially to Catulle Mendès. In the exquisite prose of *Azul* . . . we find flexibility, delicacy, fine shading, clarity and precision of expression; rhythmical flow of language; absence of provincialism and of all local color, characteristic of the prose *Modernistas*.

When Darío went to Madrid in 1892, four years after the publication of *Azul . . .*, he was received with open arms by the established poets and critics of Spain; they still looked upon him as one of themselves and failed to see in him the literary revolutionist that was soon to overturn them from their pedestals. Four years later, with the publication of his *Prosas Profanas*, he became the recognized leader of the new movement in literature known as *Modernismo*.

That the great change in Darío's literary principles was a gradual one and that it was entirely self-conscious may be ascertained from a careful study of his writings. Some of the signs of change have been already noted in *Azul . . .*, particularly in the prose selections. The definition that he gives of *Modernismo* in the introduction that he wrote in 1890 for a volume of *Tradiciones Peruanas* by Ricardo Palma shows the progress he had already made in the new direction:—"el espíritu nuevo que hoy anima a un pequeño pero triunfante y soberbio grupo de escritores y poetas de la América española. Conviene a saber: la elevación y la demostración en la crítica, con la prohibición de que el maestro de escuela anodino y el pedagogo chascarrillero penetren en el templo del arte; la libertad y el vuelo; el triunfo de lo bello sobre lo preceptivo en la prosa, y la novedad en la poesía; dar color y vida y aire y flexibilidad al antiguo verso que sufría anquilosis, apretado entre tomados moldes de hierro. Por eso, él (Ricardo Palma), el impecable, el orfebre buscador de joyas viejas, el delicioso anticuario de frases y refranes, aplaude a Díaz Mirón, el poderoso, y a Gutiérrez Nájera, cuya pluma aristocrática no escribe para la burguesía literaria, y a Rafael Obligado, y a Puya Acal, y al chileno Tondreau, y al salvadoreño Gavidia, y al guatemalteco Domingo Estrada." The critical essays that he collected in book form in 1893 under the title *Los Raros* showed his entire sympathy with the new movement and established his reputation with the *Modernistas* as an authoritative critic and a master of Spanish prose. In these excellent studies of the more individualistic of the older poets, that "soñador maravilloso," Edgar Allen Poe, for example, and of the contemporary *décadents* and *symbolistes* poets of France, Verlaine, Rémy de Gourmont, Moréas, etc., he put before his fellow *Moderinstas* the literary principles that they should follow. His own poems written about the same time and collected in 1896 in the volume, *Prosas Profanas*, assured for

him leadership among the ardent young poets that were making Buenos Aires the literary center of the new movement. With all the enthusiasm of revolutionists he and his followers made their attack upon traditional literary principles. Recalling this period of his life in Buenos Aires he wrote in 1912 in his autobiography (*La Vida de Rubén Darío escrita por el mismo*, page 196), "Yo hacía todo el daño que me era posible al dogmatismo hispano, al anquilosamiento académico, a la tradición hermosillesca, a lo pseudo-clásico, a lo pseudo-romántico, a lo pseudo-realista y naturalista, y ponía a mis raros de Francia, de Italia, de Inglaterra, de Rusia, de Escandinavia, de Bélgica y aun de Holanda y de Portugal, sobre mi cabeza."

The collection of poems published in 1896 with the curious title, *Prosas Profanas*, established for all time Darío's leadership in the literary movement known as *El Modernismo* in Spanish America and in Spain; he it was who first completely assimilated the poetic principles of the French symbolists and made of them an integral part of modern Spanish poetics. He had indeed his precursors in Spanish America to whom due credit should be given, the three poets mentioned at the beginning of this article, any one of whom might have disputed with Darío the title of leadership had he been permitted to live a few years longer. In the writings of these poets may be found almost all the innovations of the *Modernistas*, but in none of them so completely and definitely as in the writings of the Nicaraguan poet.

Before Darío came into close contact with French literature, the violent reaction from realism and Parnassianism, known as the *décadent* movement, had fallen into disrepute because of the absurd exaggerations and the licentious modes of living of some of its exponents; it had already given way to the allied, though more respectable, *symbolist* movement. It was this movement that had reached its efflorescence when the French influence upon Darío became strong, and in many poems of his *Prosas Profanas* its essential characteristics may be found.

First, as regards the technical aspect, we find a great change of permanent value to Spanish poetry, a casting off of all the rules of prosody that depended merely upon their age and traditional prestige for their authority. In the longer verse forms the caesural pause was freely shifted, and in many cases little attention was given to the coincidence of metrical and sense pauses. His com-

plete mastery of many metrical forms gave him the reputation of being the most skilful and versatile metrist in Spanish. This multiplicity of metrical forms was due more to his careful study of Spanish poets from the earliest times down to his own day than to his imitation of the bold experiments of the French symbolists or to his own invention. Probably very little, if anything, entirely new in prosody was invented by him; archaic meters were given new life; old and disused forms were resurrected and given new flexibility. Gonzalo de Berceo, Juan Ruiz, Góngora and others rewarded his study with many suggestions. When accused by conservative critics of rashly imitating French metrical experiments, he could well say in his defense that he would have no fear in confessing to "cualquiera de los dos Luises o a Fray Gabriel Téllez."

His indebtedness to early Spanish poets and his extraordinary metrical skill have been recognized by many critics. The statement made by Ramón Pérez de Ayala in his *Ofrenda de España a Rubén Darío* is typical of many that might be quoted: "No hay metro alguno de los empleados en la poesía castellana, desde sus orígenes, que Rubén Darío no haya conocido en su más secreto mecanismo y tratado en consecuencia con peregrina gracia e insuperable maestría."

This breaking away from conventional forms of verse was due, in part, to another characteristic of symbolism, the close association of poetry and music. Just as Parnassianism was closely allied to painting and sculpture, was the poetry of color and form, symbolism had its closest affiliation with music, was the poetry of sound and rhythm. Unable to produce the desired musical effects by means of the conventional meters, the symbolists cast aside many of its bonds and delighted in new combinations. In *Prosas Profanas* are many masterpieces of melodious verse (*Sonatina*, *Era un aire suave*, *Sinfonía en gris mayor*), in which to the lyric melody of other great Spanish poets was added the suggestiveness of Wagnerian music.

This musical suggestiveness is closely associated with the chief characteristic of symbolism as regards content, the suggestion of ideas, sensations, moods, by means of symbols; by allusion merely, not by direct mention or description. Darío's fine literary taste and capacity for self-criticism kept him from going to the absurd extreme of some of the *Symbolistes* and *Modernistas*, who attempted to

work out a definite scheme of sense associations, color in music, music in color, color and perfume in vocal sounds. Quite apparent, however, in his *Prosas Profanas* is this tendency of the symbolists, the result of the strong reaction from the precision and objectivism of the Parnassians. Many examples might be given of this suggestiveness of Wagnerian music, of this entire subjectivity, in which vague personal sensations have taken the place of the logical ideas and clear-cut images of the Parnassians. The eminent novelist Valle Inclán, in the preface to his *Corte de Amor*, ascribed this subjectivity in the *Modernistas* to "un vivo anhelo de personalidad," because of which there was to be seen in the younger writers "más empeño por expresar sensaciones que ideas. Las ideas jamás han sido patrimonio exclusivo de un hombre, y las sensaciones sí."

Associated with this expression of purely personal sensations and the suggestiveness of symbols and sounds are other qualities in *Prosas Profanas* that are readily excused in the exquisite poetry of Rubén Darío, but that brought his influence into disrepute in the abuses of his servile imitators. With him the disassociation of art and morality did not result in licentiousness of thought, because of his innate refinement and his belief in the identity of truth and beauty, the object of his life-long cult. The refined sensualism that made physical love the motive for many beautiful poems was held in check by this love of the beautiful, by his instinctive shrinking from all that is vulgar or ugly in the moral as in the material world. His aristocratic exclusiveness, symbolized by the *torre de marfil*, the *torre ebúrnea*, the *alcázar interior*, to which he retired for poetic inspiration, broke, for the time being, all vital contact with the world of reality, a contact that was to be re-established fortunately at a later period. The cosmopolitanism that permitted his spirit to wander at will through all ages and all countries in search of the beautiful and the rare resulted in his temporary "anti-americanism," the studied avoidance of local color and racial traditions that became mere affectation in his imitators. The exoticism that produced *Divagación* readily lent itself to mere artistry in a school of poets. The elegant artificiality of the court-life of Versailles in the 18th century made its irresistible appeal during this period and inspired some of his most beautiful verses, a notable example being the Watteauesque fantasy, beginning:

Era un aire suave, de pausados giros;
 el hada Harmonía ritmaba sus vuelos;
 e iban frases vagas y tenues suspiros
 entre los sollozos de los violoncellos.

The exoticism of the poet of *Prosas Profanas* found expression also in many lines and poems of Hellenic inspiration,—a Hellenism, it should be noticed, not of ancient Greece, but that of Italy of the Renaissance (*Friso*, *Palimpsesto*, etc.), or that of France in the early years of the 18th century and in the late years of the 19th:

Amo más que la Grecia de los griegos
 la Grecia de la Francia, porque en Francia
 al eco de las risas y los juegos
 su más dulce licor Venus escancia.

The strange title that Darío gave to this collection of poems was as a red flag in the eyes of conservative critics, who either lacked understanding of its significance or were out of sympathy with the author's poetic ideals. On the other hand, it cannot but seem strangely appropriate to one who appreciates the literary qualities of the poems contained in the volume and the etymological history of the two words *prosa* and *profana*. In his study of the Old Spanish poets Darío became familiar with their use of *prosa* in the sense of "poem in the vernacular." He knew, too, the sequences or *proses*, Latin hymns that resulted from the setting of words to the music following the Alleluia in the Roman Catholic liturgy, a practice that became popular in the early 10th century. That the title was suggested by these sacred *proses* of the liturgy is clearly indicated by the second element, *profanas*, that is, "not sacred." This conjectural explanation of the title and the literary qualities already noted in the poetry indicate its appropriateness. Just as the liturgical hymns, the "sacred proses," broke away from the quantitative meters of Latin verse and came to depend for their rhythms upon accent, so the "profane proses" of Darío broke away from conventionality in form and content. "C'est une trouvaille," exclaimed the subtle critic of the *Symbolistes*, Rémy de Gourmont, and there are now few critics who will not agree with him.

The publication of *Prosas Profanas* in 1896 established Rubén Darío's leadership in Spanish America in the new literary movement known as *Modernismo*. His three precursors, already men-

tioned, had prepared the way for the general acceptance of the new ideas; moreover, because of the close literary relations between France and Spanish America, the Spanish-American writers were on familiar terms with the *Décadents* and *Symbolistes*. Known first as *Decadentistas* and *Simbolistas*, they preferred the new name, *Modernistas*, and as such they are now generally known.

It was in Spain itself that the new movement met with strong opposition. More conservative than the Spanish Americans, less familiar with the literary movements in France, the poets and critics of Spain still followed the literary conventions and traditions, and treated with open hostility or silent contempt the new volume of poetry of Darío, whose *Azul* . . . they had received so kindly a few years before. Then came the disastrous war with the United States, with its resultant shock to their complacent acceptance of traditional methods. The older and more conservative writers looked on with apathy and pessimism; the younger and more vigorous assumed a receptive attitude toward the writers of other countries, especially those of their own race in the New World. As a result of the war Spain and her former colonies were brought into a closer intellectual and cultural union than had existed for almost a century. Because of wide-spread suspicion of the imperialistic tendencies of the "Colossus of the North," and because of racial affinities, Spanish American writers rallied to the support of the afflicted mother country, and the latter, her pride humbled, was ready for a family reconciliation. In the closing years of the century many Spanish American writers found their way to Spain and gave effective aid in the spread of new and progressive ideas. Among the names of the contributors to the many new periodicals and reviews that attest the literary revival appear those of the leading *Modernistas*, Rubén Darío of Nicaragua, Amado Nervo of Mexico, Leopoldo Díaz and Lugones of Argentina, Díaz Rodríguez of Venezuela. The younger writers of Spain welcomed the new influence; the older held themselves coldly aloof. In his autobiography (1912) Darío says of the year and a half that he spent in Spain in 1899 and 1900 as foreign correspondent for *La Nación* of Buenos Aires: "Espancí entre la juventud los principios de libertad intelectual y de personalismo artístico, que habían sido la base de nuestra vida nueva en el pensamiento y en el arte de escribir hispano-americanos, y que causaron allá espanto y enojo entre los intransigentes." Worse than

active hostility was for him persistent indifference. In the series of letters that he sent to *La Nación* (collected in 1901 under the title, *La España contemporánea*) he gave expression to his dissatisfaction with the progress being made. "There is nothing," he wrote in his letter of November 28, 1899, "que justifique ataques, ni siquiera alusiones. La procesión fastuosa del combatido arte moderno ha tenido apenas algunas vagas parodias." He declared that, except in Catalonia, Spanish writers were not interested in the new literature, that the traditional formalism and a peculiarly Spanish system of morality and aesthetics made ineffective "todo soplo cosmopolita, como asimismo la expansión individual, la libertad, digámoslo con la palabra consagrada, el anarquismo en el arte, base de lo que constituye la evolución moderna o modernista." That he underestimated his own influence and that his pessimism was unfounded is proved by the rapidity with which the new movement spread and by the fact that among his admirers at that time were several young writers who have since become the acknowledged leaders of contemporary Spanish literature, Valle Inclán, Pío Baroja, Benavente, Martínez Sierra, Juan Ramón Jiménez, Azorín, and others of almost equal importance.

No sooner had *Modernismo* gained general recognition in Spain and Spanish America during the first years of the present century than a new tendency began to deplete its ranks of its most virile and talented writers; the first phase of the movement gave place to the second, that of present-day literature, in which Darío became one of the best exponents, although no longer the undisputed leader. This breaking of ranks was due to many causes. Darío, especially in the symbolist stage of his evolution, was not a safe poet to imitate, except by those of strong individuality and sound literary judgment; and unfortunately many of his most ardent admirers lacked these qualities. Some of the most easily imitated characteristics of his *Prosas Profanas* were not far removed from mannerisms, were saved from becoming defects by his exquisite poetic temperament and fine literary taste; some of his followers, lacking these saving qualities, soon brought the name of their leader into disrepute. His aristocratic exclusiveness became with them snobbishness; his exquisiteness, his ultra-refinement of thought and word, became effeminate affectation; his skilful metrical experiments led to all sorts of exaggerations; his symbolism opened the way to unintelligible

euphuism; his poems inspired by the elegance of 18th-century court life in France and by Hellenism of the French variety let loose a deluge of poems on the same themes, but without inspiration. As in the case of that other great poet of three centuries ago, Luis Góngora, with whom Darío might well be compared as regards poetic temperament and literary influence, the master suffered from the abuses of his followers; just as *gongorista* came to be a term of reproach, so *rubendariaco*. Qualities permissible in one great poet become intolerable in a school of poets. "¡No existiría un peligro igual para la armonía de la Naturaleza y para la sociedad de los hombres, si todas las plantas fueran orquídeas; diamantes y rubíes todas las piedras; todas las aves cisnes o faisanes; y todas las mujeres sirvieran para figurar en crónicas de Gyp y cuentos de Mendés" (José Enrique Rodó, in his masterly analysis of *Prosas Profanas*).

The more vigorous and talented of the younger poets, seeking freedom from the bonds of tradition, began by recognizing Darío as master, but having once gained this freedom, they were determined to retain it. They perceived, too, the danger that lurked in too close imitation of a poet inimitable in his own special field; they turned away from the artificiality and pose of too many of the *Modernistas*, from their dilettanteism, from their French and Hellenic exoticism; they strove to cast off all foreign influence and struck out along a new path that has led them back to nature, to actual life as they see it, to racial and national inspiration. Darío himself was quick to see the injury being done to his reputation by a too servile imitation that he was far from desiring: "No busco que nadie piense como yo, ni se manifieste como yo. ¡Libertad! ¡Libertad! mis amigos. Y no os dejéis poner librea de ninguna clase" (*Opiniones*, 1906). As far back as 1899 he was aware of the harm being done the movement by the tendency toward mere artistry of some of those calling themselves *Modernistas*. In his letter to *La Nación* for November 28th of that year he wrote: "Hoy no se hace modernismo—ni se ha hecho nunca—con simples juegos de palabras y de ritmos. Hoy los ritmos implican nuevas melodías que cantan en lo íntimo de cada poeta la palabra del mágico Leonardo: Cosa bella mortal passa, e non dell' arte."

Even before it became generally apparent that *Modernismo* was to lose its ablest supporters, the versatile genius of Darío was assim-

ilating the new ideas in literature. Rather than remain the leader of a lost cause, he preferred to follow the lead of the able exponents of the "New Poetry." Moreover, the new movement struck a responsive chord in his nature; ideas and feelings that had lain dormant until then were now given an opportunity for expression, the result being the production of some of his most enduring poems. The volume of poetry published in 1905 with the significant title, *Cantos de Vida y Esperanza*, gives him an important place among the most vigorous poets of contemporary literature.

These poems composed during the six years from 1899 to 1905 show no absolute break with the poetic theories that underlie the poems composed during the preceding ten years and published as *Prosas Profanas* in 1896 and in 1900; there is, however, in many of them a new note that clearly differentiates the third stage of his literary evolution from the two preceding. With the avowed purpose of breaking the bonds of conventionality and tradition in both the form and content of poetry, he had consciously avoided local color and racial feeling; he had even sought remoteness from the actualities of life, taking refuge in his high tower of ivory, his *alcázar interior*, to which pure art alone could find an entrance. The result was the production of many poems of exquisite beauty in form, of rare refinement in thought and sentiment, of great metrical variety. The result was, too, the suppression of that part of his nature that was ready to respond to the call of race and of humanity when permitted to do so. That pure art alone could not satisfy him he tells us in the preface to his *Cantos de Vida y Esperanza*:

La torre de marfil tentó mi anhelo,
quise encerrarme dentro de mí mismo
y tuve hambre de espacio y sed de cielo
desde las sombras de mi propio abismo

Cosmopolitan aspirations harmonized with his poetic theories so long as he remained under the influence of the French symbolists and so long as he remained in Spanish America; later, study and travel in the mother country and absence from his native land during his sojourn in many parts of Europe aroused in him the pride of race that supplied him with new themes for poetic inspiration. In the stately, measured hexameters of the *Salutación del Optimista*, "Ínclitas razas ubérrimas, sangre de España fecunda," he shows

his pride in the glorious accomplishments of the Spanish race and his firm belief in the renaissance of its spirit and ideals. Similarly in the poem *Al Rey Oscar*:

¡Mientras el mundo aliente, mientras la esfera gire,
mientras la onda cordial alimente un ensueño;
mientras haya una viva pasión, un noble empeño,
un buscado imposible, una imposible hazaña,
una América oculta que hallar, vivirá España.

With racial pride, nowhere manifest in his earlier poems, he says in *Los Cisnes*, "Soy un hijo de América, soy un nieto de España." Criticized because of his Gallicism in *Prosas Profanas* and in *Azul* . . ., he shows in many poems of his last phase that he was thoroughly Spanish at heart.

Just as at the call of race, so at the call of humanity his muse ventures forth from his ivory tower, from the "jardín de sueño, lleno de rosas y de cisnes vagos," into the world of actualities, the result being a quite noticeable growth in the seriousness of his conception of the poet's mission. There is in the poems of this collection less of the aristocratic exclusiveness; although he still shows little desire to become the poet of the masses, he does show interest in what the masses are doing and thinking. Love as a theme of inspiration no longer holds its dominant position; other feelings and passions, contemporary events and men of action supply material for poetical compositions in which the content becomes as important as the form. The exoticism of *Prosas Profanas*, "muy siglo diez y ocho y muy antiguo y muy moderno, audaz, cosmopolita," was in keeping with the poet's conception of art at that time, his "bookish" inspiration, his self-conscious seeking for the quintessence of thought and sensation; it would have been out of place in poems inspired by contemporary life and deep personal feeling. If the charge of effeminacy was not without foundation when applied to the poet of *Prosas Profanas*, it could surely no longer be made* against the poet who had written *Marcha triunfal*, with its strong free verse and bold rhythmic swing in the Whitmanesque manner. Equally vigorous in form and content is the ode, *A Roosevelt*, in which the poet voices the widespread suspicion of Spanish Americans in the first years of the century toward the imperialistic tendencies of the strong Anglo-Saxon Republic. "Tened cuidado. ¡Vive la América española! Hay mil cachorros sueltos del León

español." If physical strength be lacking, God will protect that part of America "que aun reza a Jesucristo y aun habla en español."

Just as the first part of the title of *Cantos de Vida y Esperanza* indicates a closer contact with life, so the second part suggests renewed hopefulness in the author's outlook upon life. *Prosas Profanas* is perhaps "un libro optimista," as José Enrique Rodó said of it, "a condición de que no confundáis el optimismo poética con la alegría de Roger Bontemps"; and yet, because of his comparative lack of seriousness toward his art, its optimism is much less convincing than that of *Cantos de Vida y Esperanza*. That he had periods of doubt and melancholy when he drank deep of the cup of bitterness is proved by such poems as *Melancolía*, *Nocturno*, *Lo Fatal*, *Letanía de nuestro señor Don Quijote*, in which we find a world-weariness and despondency more profound than in any of his earlier poems because of the more evident sincerity of the poet's emotions. There are, however, other poems, *Salutación del Optimista*, for example, in which his optimism is equally evident. Moreover, his prose writings of about the same time confirm the sincerity of this optimism. After listening to the pessimistic complaints of Nuñez de Arce (*Un paseo con Nuñez de Arce, España Contemporánea*), he exclaims: "la misión del poeta es cultivar la esperanza, ascender a la verdad por el ensueño y defender la nobleza y frescura de la pasajera existencia terrenal, así sea amparándose en el palacio de la divina mentira." In *Tierras Solares*, 1904, speaking of the "tristeza andaluza," he says: "Yo tengo fe en la vida y en el porvenir. Quizá pronto la nueva aurora pondrá un poco de su color de rosa en esa flor de poesía nostálgica. Y al ruiseñor que canta por la noche al hechizo de la luna, sucederá una alondra matutina que se embriague de sol." In the first stanza of the prefatory poem of *Cantos de Vida y Esperanza*, he repeats the same idea in poetic form:

Yo soy aquel que ayer no más decía
el verso azul y la canción profana,
en cuya noche un ruiseñor había
que era alondra de luz por la mañana.

A tranquil spirit, faith in life and Christianity, is indicated by the last stanza of the same poem:

La virtud está en ser tranquilo y fuerte;
 con el fuego interior todo se abrasa;
 se triunfa del rencor y de la muerte,
 ¡y hacia Belén . . la caravana pasa!

The volume of poems entitled *Cantos de Vida y Esperanza* represents most fully Darío's third and last phase. Other poems, singly and in collections, have appeared at longer or shorter intervals since, representative of all three phases; the great majority of them, however, belong to the third stage of his literary evolution, in which he is still one of the greatest poets, although no longer the undisputed leader. In this present-day literary movement young and vigorous poets, called the "New Poets" for lack of a better name, having gained freedom from the bonds of traditional rhetoric and prosody, have sought freedom from foreign influence in the content of their poetry; they have turned to national or racial themes for inspiration and are striving to bring about the complete *Americanization* of Spanish-American literature. Darío was in sympathy with the new tendency, in which strength is the quality desired above all others, but was not willing to go so far as his younger contemporaries in the new direction; he was too much of the cosmopolitan to limit thus his sources of inspiration, too ardent a lover of beauty in all its forms to restrict his manner of expression, too complex of character and variable of mood to attempt to be consistent in all his literary productions. If it is certain, then, that he has had to give way to other claimants for the title *El Poeta de América* (José Santos Chocano, for example), it is equally certain that if Rodó were now writing his famous essay on Darío, he would not think of beginning it as he did in 1899, "Indudablemente, Rubén Darío no es el poeta de América." In many of the poems of his last phase he gives vigorous expression to his love for his native country and for all the countries in which Spanish is spoken; reminiscences of childhood and youth in Nicaragua (*Allá lejos*), New World scenes, indigenous legends and heroes (*Momotombo*, *Tutucotzimí*, *Caupolicán*), love of native land ("Si pequeña es la Patria, uno grande la sueña," *Retorno*), exultant pride in the accomplishments of his race (*Canto a la Argentina*).

The last mentioned poem, the longest of his poetical compositions, is a notable contribution to the "New Poetry." When Argentina celebrated the centenary of her Declaration of Independence it was

fitting that Darío should contribute the best that was in him toward the celebrations. He had spent many years in Buenos Aires on the staff of *La Nación*; for a still longer period he had lived in Europe as foreign correspondent for the same great newspaper; it was in Buenos Aires that recognition was first given his leadership in the new literary movement known as *Modernismo*, and it was there that he was always sure of the warmest welcome; in short, Argentina was the country of his predilection though not of his birth. It was therefore fitting that Argentina should be the theme of his longest poem. In forty-five stanzas, ranging in length from eight lines to seventy-six, the lines varying in length from six syllables to twelve, he describes the multifarious activities and aspects of the great Southern Republic, calls attention to her past achievements and predicts a more glorious future, the refrain "en la fiesta del centenario" supplying the motif. Because of his heartfelt interest in the theme and because of the greatness of the theme itself, his inspiration is sustained from the invocation of the first line, "¡Argentina! ¡Argentina!" to the concluding verses taken from the national anthem, "Oíd, mortales, el grito sagrado: ¡Libertad! ¡Libertad! ¡Libertad!" Liberty and opportunity are the two words engraved on her portals and carried to the ends of the earth with trumpet blast. The fertile pampas, almost boundless in extent and inexhaustible in productiveness; Buenos Aires, the teeming metropolis of the Southern Hemisphere, offer liberty and opportunity. In search of these many have come and many more will come to this promised land, this "paraíso terrestre," this "Atlántida resuscitada." The elements that go into this vast melting-pot of the Southern continent for the amalgamation of many races, "el cósmico portento de obra y de pensamiento que arde en las políglotas muchedumbres," are vividly characterized, Russians, Jews, Italians, Spaniards, French. The temptation to illustrate his brilliant characterizations of the different races is strong, but must be resisted. With clear eye and sure hand he pictures Argentina of today in all its manifold aspects; turning the flash-light of his poetic inspiration now upon the past, now upon the future, he exults in the greater Argentina that is to be. In the vigorous optimistic poet of the *Canto a la Argentina*, with its well-sustained epic flight, there is little to remind us of the exquisite artist, the symbolistic, subjective poet of *Prosas Profanas*, unless it be the notable mastery of meters and rhythms.

In conclusion, I wish to remind the reader that my aim has been to present Rubén Darío as the best representative of recent literary tendencies in Spanish American poetry, the representative of three clearly differentiated groups of poets, the "Parnassians," the "Modernists" and the "New Poets." This preconceived plan, the consideration of his writings from the historical point of view, explains the emphasizing of certain literary qualities that may not be the most important in assuring him immortality as a poet; it precludes, too, the discussion of certain questions that pertain to him as an individual poet, rather than as the representative of certain literary tendencies: his inconsistencies of refined sensualism and lofty spiritualism, the continual conflict between his Epicurean philosophy and Roman Catholicism. For more exhaustive or more specialized studies of Darío, the reader is referred to the numerous books and articles by such well-known critics as José Enrique Rodó, Andrés González Blanco, Martínez Sierra, Ramón Pérez de Ayala, Tulio Cestero and others. His importance in modern Spanish literature as the best representative of recent literary tendencies has been indicated by this article; he is more important as the poet "que ha introducido un acento nuevo en la lírica española" (A. González Blanco. *Obras Escogidas de Rubén Darío. Estudio preliminar*); he is most important as the author of several lyrical masterpieces that justify Martínez Sierra's application to him of the title "el gran maestro de la belleza dicha en verso español."

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